

North West Ambulance staff at 'wits end' over new procedure



Unions have called on trust to change procedure seeing ambulance workers called anywhere across the North West with up to 40 minutes drive time

Health unions GMB, Unison, Unite and the RCN have accused North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) trust of 'failing both patients and staff' after its new procedure for dispatching emergency calls has seen ambulance staff sent from up to 40 minutes away to a callout.

The trust has introduced a new system for deploying ambulances, which sees any ambulance within 40 minutes being immediately assigned for category 2 calls.



The calls are classed as an emergency for a potentially serious condition that may require rapid assessment, urgent on-scene intervention and/or urgent transport.

With the trust covering the whole North West, it can often mean ambulances driving for miles across the region in 'blue-light conditions' only to be relieved by a closer more local ambulance team.

Unions have complained that the introduction has ambulance crews are at their wits end and exhausted after being sent to calls up to 30 miles away prepared to respond to an emergency, only to be diverted to another call back from the area they were originally.

It is clear there aren't enough ambulances to meet this demand with this ambulance trust being at the point of collapse due either to lack of funding or mismanagement.

Steve Rice, GMB Branch Secretary, said:

"Our members are on edge and at their wits end, it's an exhausting way to expect us to work.

"This move has seen each vehicle seeing less patients as running times increase, taken away dispatcher's autonomy to control and gives very little or no thought to staff safety.

"The issue is this system just doesn't prioritise getting someone to the incident quickly, it just incentivises assigning the case quickly. It fails both patients and staff.

"This situation can't hold, and the trust need to end this practice immediately to protect ambulance staff and enable constructive dialogue to take place."

Jeff Gorman, UNISON Branch Secretary, said:

"UNISON has serious concerns about the introduction of EOC0001.

"Our members are telling us that they are spending most of their shift responding to 999 calls that are on occasions in excess of 40 minute travel time only to be stood down and sent to another 999 call that is back where they started off from, sometimes actually passing addresses that are waiting for an ambulance and they are not actually seeing patients as a result of this.

"We believe that this is putting patients at risk and is detrimental to the Health and Wellbeing of our members".

Neil Cosgrove, UNITE Branch Secretary, said:

"For a quite some time, UNITE has raised serious concerns with the management of NWS about the way in which changes have been proposed and introduced, which has had a significant impact on service delivery.



The introduction of procedures which are having a significant impact on our members Health, Safety and Welfare, as well as a significant increase to the risk to patient care is no longer acceptable.”

Estephanie Dunn, Regional Director for the Royal College of Nursing in the North West, said:

“The RCN is deeply concerned about the introduction of these measures and the inevitable impact on the health and wellbeing of staff at NWS.

“Many of our members are on the end of the phone dealing with the callers and any delay in attending a patient will add pressure to what might be a very distressing situation for the caller. We fully expect that staff will face abuse due to stress and frustration. It is imperative staff are protected from this and we call upon management to intervene and support their psychological safety.

“Moreover, patient safety is paramount and we believe this will be put at risk from increased wait times should this proposal be implemented. We urge NWS to work with all of the Unions representing staff at the Trust to listen and work with us.”

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